

KAUR celebrates 20 years

by Brian Wilsnack

Twenty years ago Augustana seized the 89.1 frequency on the FM dial, bringing the new KAUR to Augustana and Sioux Falls listeners.

Augie has enjoyed the comfort of a campus radio station since 1947, when students and faculty created KOLE, a small station located at 690 AM which had only enough power to be heard by students on campus. Named after Ole, the Viking mascot, the station operated out of a homemade studio in the basement of the old Central Services building and could be heard for only an hour a day.

In 1948, KOLE ran into a snag when the Federal Communications Commission informed Augustana that the "KOLE" call letters had already been claimed earlier by a Texas radio station. KOLE became KAUR, a contraction of "Augustana Radio," and extended its operating time to 22 hours a day.

The station changed locations again, to a greenhouse north of the administration building, with a schedule of classical music, drama and news. Due to a lack of staff, outdated equipment and a leaky roof, KAUR was forced to shut down in 1958.

In October 1972, KAUR made a triumphant return, this time on the FM dial. Operating at 89.1 in

the Viking Villa, a small building located west of Stavig Hall, the station offered a variety of rock, classical and jazz music.

Four years later, the station moved to the top floor of Old Main. By this time, KAUR was running 6 a.m. to midnight but would switch to a 24-hour format in 1981, when its 380 watts of power would expand its listening audience to a 15-mile radius.

KAUR made a final move in 1986 to its present location with Minnesota Public Radio in Tuve



Hall, where it transmits its 680-watt alternative music signal to a 30-mile radius of listeners.

The radio station has always been run by students, and even though many of the problems have been straightened out, the new generation of KAUR operators still face many changes and challenges.

"KAUR used to be an all-album format," said Shane Semmler, the station's program director. "That was its claim to fame. Now it's more CDs than

albums.

Semmler, who began DJ-ing in high school, believes that the recent acceptance of mainstream listeners to alternative groups like R.E.M. and Alice in Chains has made KAUR's job harder. Since the station can't play mainstream songs, once KPAT plays an alternative song, it has to be taken off KAUR's list.

Another problem, he says, is the lack of student involvement and/or enthusiasm about the station. Though it is an

Augustana station, he says only 30 of the 54 DJs this semester are students. KAUR has been more efficient, though, he said.

"One big improvement we've had is the new administrative

director, Tammy Roberts, who oversees KAUR," Semmler said. "She's done a better job of putting a fire underneath our butts than anyone else, and she takes a general interest in the station."

In celebration of the 20th anniversary of 89.1 KAUR, commemorative t-shirts have been on sale, and according to Tom Binger, music director of the station, the station might be considering a reunion of some of the veteran DJs from long ago.